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PROBLEMS OF POPULATION AFTER THE WAR

BY JAMES A. FIELD

The University of Chicago

The prophet is proverbially without honor. Whatever hardship this may imply in other cases, in the case of the population prophet it is simple justice. Only too often has it been proven how fallible are predictions of future movements of population. In particular, he who forecasts the changes of population which are likely to follow the present war forecasts the consequences of causes at best obscure, operating under conditions which themselves remain profoundly in doubt. The suggestions of the following paragraphs, therefore, are not put forward as prophecies, but rather to indicate some of the possibilities which may have to be dealt with when the great conflict comes to an end and the processes of readjustment begin.

The direct effects of the war upon the populations of the belligerent nations are but too terribly apparent. Not only have deaths and incapacitating casualties run into the millions; not only is there this enormous loss of numbers: the wastage has been so concentrated among males of fighting age as to work a serious distortion of the population structure. Economically, the proportion of producers to consumers has been reduced. Biologically, the balance of the two sexes is disturbed in the reproductive years of life and the capacity of monogamic increase is correspondingly impaired. Even though birth-rates may nevertheless rally at the close of the struggle, this disproportion of ages and sexes cannot thereby be corrected. It will leave its disfiguring and disabling effects for decades to come.

Nor will the present population alone bear the scars. If there is any significance in heredity, and any truth in the contention that modern warfare accomplishes an adverse selection through the slaughter of the physically bravest and best, then the new generation and through it posterity must be the continuance of an impoverished breed. This, too, is a damage that mere volume of births can hardly mend. The two inches of average stature which the French people is said to have lost in the Napoleonic wars were lost in spite of a tolerably vigorous revival of the birth-rate after those devastating campaigns. And though we may question whether the selective agency of war operates with such obvious effect upon the human characteristics of body and mind that most concern us, we cannot well doubt that lasting modifications of our racial endowment are now in process on

the battlefields of Europe. It does not follow that deterioration will be at once manifest when the next generation succeeds to leadership in Western civilization. Indeed, it is more to be feared that civilization may conform itself imperceptibly to the lowered standards of a depleted stock. In any event, history that might have been is now cut off with the lives of those whose unborn descendants would have made it. Nor is the history of Europe alone involved. Civilization is hardly local nowadays; but if it were, the basis of the changed civilization would be brought to America by immigrants, through whom we shall probably be made to share, in our own flesh and blood, the racial calamity of what we have been pleased to call a foreign war.

With the return of peace we are likely to see the beginnings of new public policies with reference to problems of population. For this there is historical precedent as well as inherent probability. The wars of 1866-71, which left a unified German Empire confronting the shaken military power of France, thereby gave a special incentive to the fostering care of the population at home and abroad which has marked the state policy of imperial Germany; and at the same time they aroused that semi-official solicitude or even alarm with which the French have since regarded their dwindling birth-rate. The Malthusian doctrine, itself an indirect product of the French Revolution, and long a dominant influence in French economics, almost abruptly lost its vogue in France when first the menace of a united Germany and then the humiliation of actual defeat gave rise to the more militaristic views which characterize the French attitude on population today. More recently, the growth of the English eugenics movement following the Boer War has afforded a fresh reminder that population policies, like other national policies, are often tested by fighting.

In the past the concern of nations for questions of population has been based on a conviction that the balance of population is the balance of power. Superiority of numbers was of course not all: money was long ago recognized as the sinews of war. But it was felt that, given exuberant numbers, the requisite national wealth would be forthcoming. Even beggars, said one old writer, can be taxed. Doubtless, so long as the necessary equipment is available, the military importance of great numbers of men is hard to exaggerate. But the technique of modern warfare, exemplified especially by the unparalleled use of artillery and high explosives, demonstrates how little can be accomplished hereafter by men alone. War is more and more a supreme development of industry and finance. Nations which prepare for war

must shape their policies accordingly. Quite possibly the economic power to wage a successful war will not be found greatest where there has been the greatest increase of population.

At this point the program of military preparedness encounters the standard of living. We are familiar with the notion that a man's standard of living is defined by the wants he insists upon satisfying before he is willing to enlarge his family. If, now, he is compelled to make contributions to the state treasury for military purposes, this public demand upon him takes precedence over even the preferred items of his private wants, and tends by so much more to reduce that part of his resources which might be devoted to provision for children. No nation, therefore, that has to reckon with the voluntarily small family can expect to add indefinitely to the burdens of taxation without encountering a still further restriction of births. Efforts to achieve preponderance of armament and organization may threaten the loss of preponderance in men.

In war time admittedly standards of living change and their effects on the birth-rate are modified. Motives of patriotism lead to a cutting-down of the scale of personal expenditure, the more easily because at such times a universal rivalry in acts of patriotic devotion supplies an equivalent for the various emulative conventionalities of ordinary life. Moreover, by challenging the nation's power to survive, war seems characteristically to intensify the desire for children. Possibly a change of attitude is foreshadowed by the present revulsion of feeling against bearing children for slaughter. However, all these considerations are aspects of the psychology of war. They accompany phases of social life which are happily exceptional. It is in the longer intervals of peace, when standards of living operate more normally, that populations are replenished, war chests are filled, and the debts of old wars are paid off.

Aside from all questions of future military establishments it has yet to be seen if the stupendous war debts that are now rolling up can be carried and eventually repaid without serious disturbances of what has been the prevailing rate and manner of the increase of population. Because just now victory in the European conflict seems supremely desirable to the several belligerents, they have seen fit to levy the cost of their respective struggles for victory upon a subsequent generation. Thus the economic choices of Englishmen and Frenchmen and Germans for years to come will to an oppressive degree have been already exercised for them, vicariously, and through the bloodshot eyes of deadlocked combatants. This is the natural consequence of

deficit financiering in time of war. How disturbing may be the effects upon habits of consumption, and, through standards of living, upon population, can only be conjectured. This whole vague but momentous issue lends new interest to the question of how the burdens of war taxation are to be distributed in the coming years among the various economic and social classes.

The problem of the differential birth-rate, which the foregoing discussion suggests, is likely to assume a special importance in the United States, after the war. Our well-to-do and highly conventionalized classes are closely influenced in their manner of life by the ways of the corresponding classes abroad. If the war unsettles economic class distinctions in Europe, we may expect an indirect unsettlement here. But we have our own disturbances as well. The munitions contractor and the whole group which he typifies will confront us again with the familiar and troublesome social ferment of a *nouveau riche* class arising from the commerce of war time. So long as birth-rates are sensitive to emulative standards of living, the balance of increase among different classes will hardly pass unshaken through such an economic readjustment. We must prepare for a fresh crop of small families with large fortunes, and for a revival of restiveness on the part of those persons who see in that phenomenon disregard for an indispensable condition of national welfare.

In current discussion of population questions, and particularly questions of eugenics and birth-control, a most helpful part has been taken by women. To the intelligent woman the importance of such questions is self-evident. She looks upon them sanely, frankly, and earnestly. She finds herself less embarrassed by self-consciousness in such discussions than do most men, because she is more conscious of the race interests that are at stake. We could ill spare the counsel of women in such matters, or lose their leadership in attempts to reach public opinion and open the way for reforms. If a period of militaristic reaction should follow the war, with the effect of exaggerating masculine virtues and reducing the opportunities of influence permitted to women, progress in dealing with fundamental problems of population would be seriously set back.

Our national consciousness has been quickened by the events of the last two years. Possibly this may prove to be the most important result of the war, so far as our own special population policies are concerned. In the past, indeed, the inundating stream of immigration and the disproportionately high birth-rate among the foreign-born

have aroused a certain sense of national peril—a fear lest our democratic institutions should not endure if they were abandoned to a more and more alien citizenry. For the most part, however, the national motive has not been conspicuous among the active influences determining our increase as a people. Individual self-interest has been the chief counselor, though the dictates of self-interest do not always work out social welfare in the long run. On the other hand, the more recent eugenic ideal of race betterment is too abstract to appeal with practical force to the populace. If some definite and affirmative population policy had been associated in our minds with a sense of national loyalty and the effectual motive of patriotism, the response might have been more considerable, especially since the nation, unlike either the individual or the biological race, has power to support its constructive programs by legislation and the agencies of public administration. Unfortunately national interference in our population questions has heretofore been too typically negative: it has manifested itself in minor restrictions of immigration and in the enactment and sporadic enforcement of censorious blue laws designed to compel parenthood through ignorance. But a changed attitude may come with our new desire for a thoroughgoing national preparedness and with the awakening sense of our obligations as a nation in a world of nations. Precisely what form a national population policy might best take in this country remains problematical. Probably it would provide for the adequate segregation and care of hereditary defectives. Possibly it would include a system of maternity-benefits. Certainly it should recognize that parenthood is affected with a public interest, and that those parents who accept and perform their function with a due sense of its social responsibilities must in fairness be safeguarded and sustained in the performance by the community which is a beneficiary of their conduct. Such a program must necessarily grope its way slowly at first. Yet, if an enlightened spirit of nationalism shall but lead us to make a beginning, then at least one good thing will have come to us out of the war.